

Message Text

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ACTION AGRE-00

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RABAT FOR AGATT KUHL, ROME FOR FODAG

E. O. 11652:N/A
TAGS: EAGR EAID TS
SUBJ: TUNISIAN GRAIN: CEREALS OFFICE EXPECTS ANOTHER POOR CROP

REF: ROME 7096

1. SUMMARY: TUNISIAN CEREALS OFFICE CURRENTLY ESTIMATES NEW CROP OF ALL GRAINS AT 650 TO 750 THOUSAND METRIC TONS, WITH LIKELY IMPORT REQUIREMENTS FOR NEW CEREAL YEAR (STARTING JULY 1) OF 700 TO 800 THOUSAND TONS. IN ANY EVENT, TUNISIA'S IMPORT REQUIREMENTS WILL AGAIN BE VERY LARGE. END SUMMARY.

2. FAO EARLY WARNING OF MID-APRIL (ROME 7096) INDICATED THAT PROSPECTS WERE FOR TOTAL TUNISIAN GRAIN CROP AS LOW AS 500,000 TONS. THIS ESTIMATE, HOWEVER, WAS NOT IN LINE WITH OTHER SUBSTANTIALLY LESS PESSIMISTIC ASSESSMENTS. ECONOMIC COUNSELOR THEREFORE CALLED MAY 9 ON ASSISTANT DIRECTOR GENERAL OF TUNISIAN OFFICE OF CEREALS MOHAMED LASSAAD MOUAFFAK TO
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SEEK THAT OFFICE'S LATEST ESTIMATES. MOUAFFAK SAID MOMENT WAS OPPORTUNE SINCE HE HAD JUST COMPLETED 4-WEEK FIELD TRIP THROUGHOUT TUNISIAN CEREAL PRODUCING AREAS AND WAS IN MIDST OF TWO-DAY SESSION WITH THE OFFICE'S REGIONAL SPECIALISTS.

3. MOUAFFAK SAID CROP IN MOST OF SOUTH AND CENTRAL

TUNISIA WAS TOTAL LOSS, WITH MANY FIELDS NOW BEING PASTURED. WHILE CROP IN NORTH WAS GOOD IN SEVERAL MAJOR AREAS (MATEUR, BIZERTE, BOU SALEM AND MOST OF BEJA), OVERALL RESULT WAS DISAPPOINTING. HE ESTIMATED TOTAL CROP TO BE HARVESTED FROM MID-JUNE TO LATE JULY AT 650 TO 750 THOUSAND TONS. OF THIS, 600 THOUSAND OR MORE WOULD COME FROM THE NORTH AND ONLY 50 TO 60 THOUSAND TONS FROM THE REST OF COUNTRY. IN OTHER WORDS, MOUAFFAK SAID, NEW CROP WILL BE EQUIVALENT TO THAT OF LAST YEAR (650-670 THOUSAND TONS) OR SLIGHTLY (UP TO 15 PERCENT) BETTER. HE SAID APPROXIMATE COMPOSITION OF TOTAL CROP (INCLUDING CEREALS FOR MARKETING, SEED AND ON-FARM CONSUMPTION) WOULD AGAIN BE APPROXIMATELY TWO-THIRDS DURUM, ONE-SIXTH BREAD WHEAT AND ON-SIXTH BARLEY.

4. MOUAFFAK NOTED THERE ARE STILL SOME RISKS AHEAD BEFORE CROP IS HARVESTED, INCLUDING DANGER OF SIROCCO (DRY WIND) IN LATE DEVELOPING AREAS SUCH AS EL KEF AND USUAL RISKS OF DAMAGE BY HAIL OR HEAVY RAINS (AS IN 1976) PRIOR TO OR DURING HARVEST.

5. WHILE PRECISE ESTIMATES OF CROP AND OF IMPORT NEEDS FOR NEW CEREAL YEAR WILL NOT BE MADE BEFORE JULY, MOUAFFAK FORESAW IMPORT REQUIREMENTS AGAIN, AS THIS CEREAL YEAR, IN 700 THOUSAND TO 800 THOUSAND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TON RANGE FOR ALL GRAINS INCLUDING CORN AS WELL AS WHEAT AND BARLEY.

6. LOCAL FAO REPRESENTATIVE RECENTLY TOLD SENIOR USAID AGRICULTURE SPECIALIST THAT HE STOOD BY HIS 500 THOUSAND TON ESTIMATE BUT THAT, WITH GOOD LUCK, THIS COULD RANGE UP TO 650,000 TONS. WE NOTE THAT THIS FIGURE CORRESPONDS TO LOWER RANGE OF MOUAFFAK'S CROP ESTIMATE.

7. EMBASSY WILL CONTINUE TO REPORT DEVELOPMENTS AND WOULD WELCOME VISIT OF USDA CROP ESTIMATION EXPERT. MULCAHY

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